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Washington's Home



And the Story of
The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association
of the Union

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WASHINGTON'S HOME

The Work *of* The Mount Vernon Ladies Association *of* the Union

THE MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION has rescued the tomb and home of Washington from destruction and has restored Mount Vernon to its old-time loveliness. Washington's home is charming to-day even as it was when weary with years of war and party strife the great man found in this loved spot the repose of private life and the tranquil retirement of a Virginia country gentleman.

To preserve Mount Vernon perpetually unchanged in memory of Washington is the *sacred trust* of the Mount Vernon Association, and this trust is held in the name of the women of the nation who purchased it.

This purchase was sealed by an act of incorporation and a charter granted by the Legislature of Virginia creating this association a private eleemosynary corporation with the right to hold the deed of this estate.

The undertaking by women to purchase Mount Vernon was started in 1853. This Association is, therefore, the oldest woman's patriotic association in this country.

It is frequently asked, How did women accomplish the purchase of Mount Vernon?

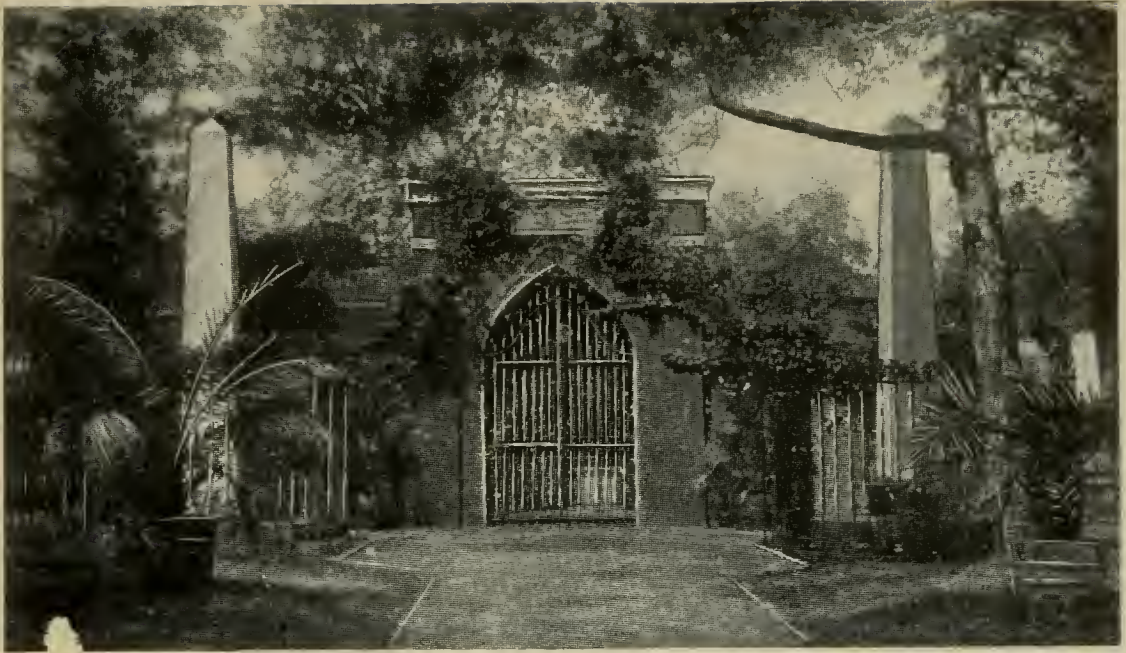
The Oft-Told Tale

Fifty years after the death of Washington, Mr. John Augustine Washington and his family were living upon this estate. Its broad acres brought a burden of responsibility without profit, for the land was poor, and the mansion and the tomb and grounds were going to ruin.

There could be no family privacy, for patriotic tourists arrived at all hours. With reluctance Mr. Washington publicly offered Mount Vernon for sale to the United States Government. He at first declined to sell to any other purchaser than to Congress.

Congress declined to purchase.

Mr. Washington next offered to sell Mount Vernon to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Its purchase was especially urged upon the Legislature. Virginia declined to purchase.



WASHINGTON'S TOMB

Speculators offered a large sum for Washington's home, and proposed to make it a place of public amusement.

In the year 1855 the "Record" said: "If it be asked why Congress does not buy and preserve Mount Vernon, we answer 'It is certain that Congress, in the first hour of grief at Washington's death, went so far as to vote the sum of sixty thousand dollars to build a mausoleum to the Father of his Country.'

"If it be asked, Where is that mausoleum? echo only answers from the crumbling roof-tree that sheltered him, from the portico where he walked at eventide, now an unsafe spot for children to play; from the tomb falling to destruction.

"The question why did not men rescue Mount Vernon can best be answered by men."

Meantime the bells tolled as steamboats passed the hallowed spot, and the tolling bell inspired the heart of a passing traveller to high endeavor.

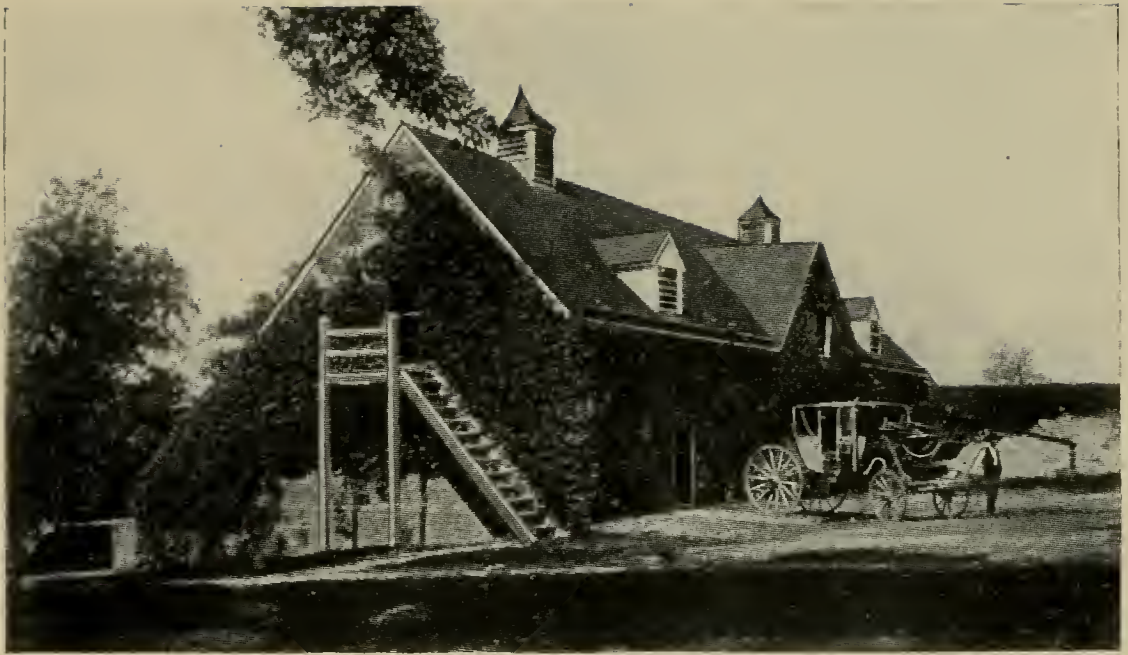
Ann Pamila Cunningham, a daughter of South Carolina, started a movement among Southern women to the rescue of Washington's home and tomb. She sent "appeals" everywhere, and she called, "*All women, help.*" A wave of patriotic enthusiasm was started that grew and swept the entire country.

Having failed to sell Mount Vernon either to Congress or to Virginia, Mr. Washington was induced to sell to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.

South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama led in the movement and Virginia fell into line. Organization and an active campaign followed, and there were lady managers in every city and county of every State, and they were everywhere enthusiastically supported by the most leading and distinguished men. One dollar subscriptions were asked, and the purchase money poured into the treasury not only from every State, but from Americans abroad, from army and navy, from Masonic societies, and from many organizations.

The missionaries heard and they took a hand, and the Judd family led the list from the Sandwich Islands, Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai.

A youthful son of Florida, with the thermometer at 85 degrees, collected \$850 in three weeks in his recess hours from school.



The Barn and Coach that was exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial as Washington's Chariot.

It is well known that Washington's Chariot has no existence. This Chariot is its FACSIMILE. IT IS NOT EXHIBITED AS A RELIC. The seasons were painted upon the four panels of Washington's Coach, and his Arms upon the door. Washington rode in this Coach on several occasions.

The Hon. Edward Everett, of Massachusetts, delivered his matchless oration on Washington in Richmond. He stated on that occasion that he would deliver it seven hundred and seventy times if the people desired, he having already pronounced it seventy times, yielding at that time \$40,000.

Mr. Everett's Southern tour was an ovation. South Carolina led the way, while the delightfully old-fashioned South Carolina gentlewoman continued sending broadcast soul-stirring "appeals," adding continual fuel to the flame of patriotic feeling that animated the nation in memory of Washington.

Miss Cunningham modestly signed her stirring epistles "The Southern Matron," for she greatly feared lest her real name should become known. She was reluctantly persuaded to abandon her incognito by her Virginia Counsellor, Mr. John Harmon Gilmer, when the formal act of incorporation took place.

The charter granted by the State of Virginia authorized the purchase of this property by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, to be forever held sacred to the "Father of his Country." The possession of a charter did not bring a guarantee that the Association would forever continue to exist, and it devolved upon the parties arranging for this purchase to provide against every possible contingency which could affect its future safety.

"A faithful discharge of duty to the remains of Washington compelled the appointment of a residuary legatee, for Mr. Washington refused to allow the property to revert to his heirs; it could not descend to subscribers, it could not be held by Congress, as by the Constitution of the United States Congress cannot hold property in a sovereign State without the consent of that State, and this Virginia would never grant.

"Necessity, therefore, as well as prudence further provided: 'If for any cause this Association should cease to exist, Mount Vernon shall revert to the State of Virginia, sacred forever to Washington.' "

"Should this fail, its guardianship should be imposed upon the Mother State."



THE SUMMER HOUSE OVERLOOKING THE DEER PARK
NIGH THE HA-HA WALL

The early membership of this Association was scattered world-wide. Its constitution calls for a regent, and for the appointment of a vice-regent to represent each State when practicable. The vice-regents are nominated by the regent and are confirmed by the Council.

Ann Pamela Cunningham was the first regent. Miss Harriet Clayton Comegys, of Dover, Delaware, is the present regent. Her father, the late Judge Comegys, Chief Justice of Delaware, was one of the first members of the Advisory Board for this Association during the Civil War. Her mother was the first vice-regent for Delaware, and under her leadership the amount contributed by Delaware toward the purchase of Mount Vernon was in proportion to its size larger than from any other State.

There have been three vice-regents for Virginia—Mrs. William Ritchie, Mrs. Thompson Mason, and the writer.

The sail down the Potomac from Washington to Mount Vernon is very delightful.

The Charles McAlister is a well-appointed, spacious steamer that was built for this excursion. Its wharf is at the end of Seventh street. It starts daily, Sundays excepted, at 10 A. M., and the tickets include a coupon, which gives admission to Mount Vernon.

Children are admitted free to the age of ten years. During the summer months there is an afternoon trip.

The view of the mansion from the river is impressive. As the steamer turns to the wharf one catches a sight of Belvoir, just beyond, and Gunston Hall, the seat of George Mason, is not far below.

There is a gentle ascent from the wharf to the tomb. A park wagon will carry one around the hill, passing the tomb to the mansion.

Most visitors prefer to walk at leisure first to the tomb, passing the ancient barn, and across to the summer house to rest a bit. Passing this way, the atmosphere of this consecrated spot quickens the imagination. The mansion, with its grand portico and colonade, stands out in beauty. It would seem Washington and his lady and their guests might be within.

Washington selected the location of his tomb, and his will directed that it should be built in brick according to



THE WHARF WITH A SECTION OF THE SEA WALL

plans drawn by himself. No change will be permitted here. No costly mausoleum shall be reared above Washington.

His wish shall be respected.

Two hundred thousand dollars were paid for two hundred acres of land. In the year 1858 the entire payment had been made, and there remained \$23,000 of the amount that had been collected. This was at once expended in repairs upon the tomb and the mansion and upon the out-buildings. The need was urgent, for the roof of the grand portico was near to falling, and was supported and propped along its entire length.

The State of New York gave \$38,378.00, followed by Massachusetts, Alabama, California, and Georgia. Virginia came seventh with a contribution of \$7,089.61.

To tell of the work done at Mount Vernon would fill a book.

The foundations of the mansion have been strongly reinforced, and the entire building has been strengthened at every possible point. The concussion of the heavy practice guns at the fort rattle the windows and jar the building.

The entrance fee of twenty-five cents makes the revenue that supports Mount Vernon.

Each year brings increasing numbers of visitors, and each succeeding year has brought increased expense.

Every visitor thus becomes a sharer in the preservation of Washington's home. There are few who are not pleased to know the source of its revenue, and that they have a part in the work.

Without a charge the place would be overrun and spoiled. *The safety of Mount Vernon requires an entrance fee.*

Very many Virginians have never seen Mount Vernon. In all this broad, restless land there is no such charming, restful and sacred spot.

Washington beautified his loved home. No pomp nor trappings of official life are here, only the unostentatious home of a Virginia gentleman.

Its simplicity and its calm repose create its wondrous charm.

From the Summer House nigh the Ha! Ha! wall, overlooking the deer park, Washington could note the loading



THE ROSE GARDEN

of his barges as they came and went from his private wharf while the bell in the cupola marked the hours of labor.

With boundless hospitality he welcomed perpetual visitors. Many distinguished guests arrived, and the Banquet Hall was built for their suitable entertainment.

Washington delighted in beautifying Mount Vernon. He loved its trees, its fruits, its gardens and box hedges.

It is necessary to see Mount Vernon to appreciate the magnitude of the work that has been accomplished there. It would fill a book to tell it all.

Look at the sea wall that prevents the river current from washing the shore away. This extended wall was the gift of the Vice-Regent for California, Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst.

It was a feat of engineering skill that bored the tunnel under the hill and emptied many hidden springs into the river that endangered the safety of the mansion itself by causing landslides.

See the enormous chemical fire apparatus with reservoirs for water near the house and a forcing engine upon the river brink, bringing an endless water supply with every modern equipment for service.

See the heating plant at a distance from the buildings.

The restoration of the Ha! Ha! wall is a recent work, done with brick from an ancient home of the Washingtons, together with the brick remaining of the old wall.

The tread of the watchman sounds all night around Mount Vernon.

The employees in uniform are a regularly constituted guard during visitors' hours.

A Partial List of Relics at Mount Vernon

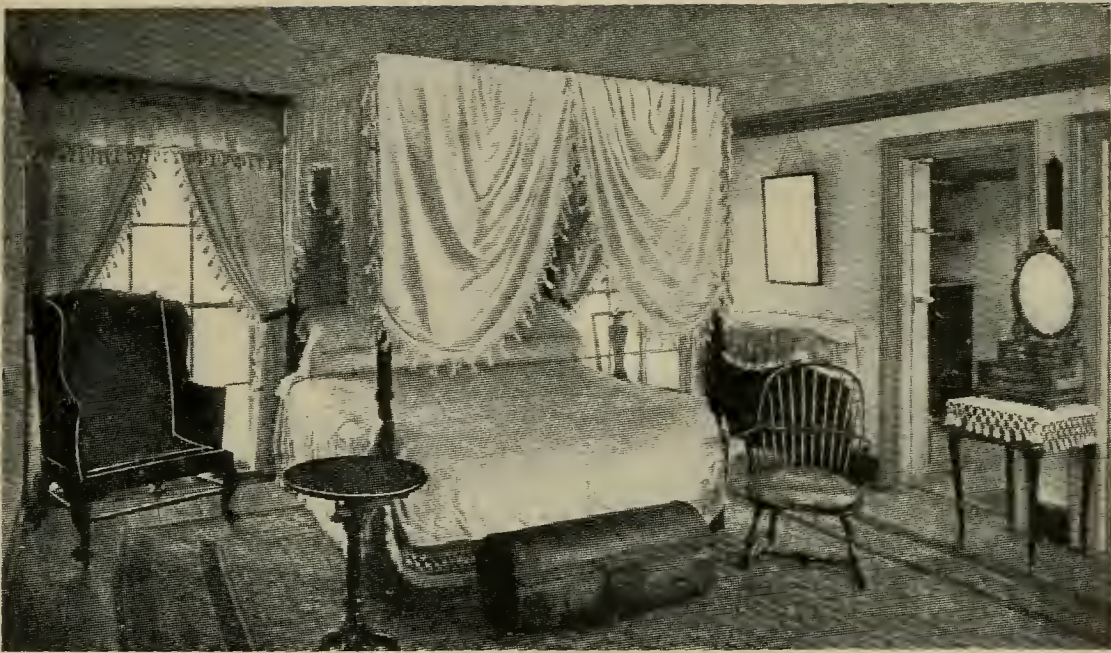
In the main hall of the mansion hang four swords.

Here is the sword Washington used in the Braddock campaign.

Here his dress sword.

This third is a sword that was made for Washington at the Solingen Armory, in Prussia.

This last (a recent gift), the silver mounted blade that he wore when resigning command of the army in 1783, and also at his inauguration as President in 1789.



WASHINGTON'S ROOM

The marble top table beneath the swords belonged to Washington.

The key of the bastille presented to Washington by LaFayette hangs in the hall.

A rug woven by order of Louis XVI and sent by him a present to Washington (in west parlor).

The harpsichord presented by Washington to Nellie Custis as a wedding gift—his flute and embroidery frame of Nellie Custis (in music room).

Family sideboard, knife boxes, pitchers and wine glasses.

The "tambour desk" and chair used by Washington in the library and left by his will to Dr. Craik. His globe and surveyor's tripod and many books bearing his autograph.

His mother's Bible recording his birth is in main hall.

A pair of brass fire dogs, presented to Washington by LaFayette (in Banquet Hall).

In his bed room. The bed upon which Washington died was entrusted to the care of the Vice-Regent of Virginia many years ago as a loan by Gen. G. N. Custis Lee. Gen. Lee has recently *given* his interest in it to the Association. Gen. Lee also loaned wall brackets in gilt and a mirror that are in music room.

Washington's mother's arm chair is here, and two cushions in worsted cross-stitch done by Mrs. Martha Washington; also a chair cover embroidered by Francis, the daughter of his brother, Charles Washington, who married her cousin, Col. Burgess Ball, his aide de camp.

A candle stand, two tables, and a hair trunk bearing G. W. in brass nails.

The shaving stand presented to Washington by the French minister to this country is a massive, elegant, and most interesting relic.

These are only a part of the relics to be seen at Mount Vernon. They are all well attested.

The Grand Council meets annually in May. At this time every detail of the management of Mount Vernon is passed in careful review. No detail is too small for consideration.

Written directions are given from Council to the Superintendent, Mr. Harrison H. Dodge, and to the Assistant Superintendent, Mr. James Young, concerning work to be done during the ensuing year. All accounts are audited, and between Council monthly reports are made to the Re-



EAST VIEW, HA-HA WALL

gent. The Regent visits Mount Vernon statedly between Councils.

The Riggs family, of Washington, were from earliest years the staunch friends of this Association, and the late lamented Mr. Frank Riggs was for many years its Treasurer.

An Endowment Fund now approaching \$120,000 has been accumulated by gifts from States and from individuals and societies and by the interest accruing.

This sum is held inviolable to meet any unforeseen emergency. In case of disaster in the course of years the Association holds the exact plans of the mansion *in every detail*, and should such a day come a complete reproduction could be made. Every precaution of watchful care is taken for the safety of Mount Vernon.

In the old kitchen at Mount Vernon may be bought guide books, Mount Vernon views, post cards of Mount Vernon, the delightful book written for the Association by Dr. Thos. Nelson Page, and other sketches exceedingly pleasing to visitors.

From all sources, including large gifts, the revenue of Mount Vernon in the year 1911 was \$37,873.35. Its expenses of every kind were \$34,045.00, leaving a balance of \$3,828.35. All of this and more is published in the annual report to be read by all. Reports may be secured from the Superintendent at Mount Vernon.

Expenses increase as the number of visitors increase, and this necessitates additional guards.

Needless to say that salaries are paid only to employees.

To the ladies of this Association this is simply a work of patriotic devotion to Washington.

Some of the Vice-Regents give largely each year from their private fortune.

Mr. Arthur Brice, of Washington, D. C., is Treasurer.

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Mr. Lewis Cass Ledyard, of New York City.

Hon. George Gray, of Wilmington, Del.

Major William Anderson, Lexington, Va., (who is the successor of the late Chief Justice Fuller).

The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association stands true to its sacred trust. While the outside world rushes and surges the calm beauty of this lovely spot will remain.

Mount Vernon will be preserved forever sacred to the memory of Washington.

MRS. CHARLES B. BALL,

Vice-Regent for Virginia, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.

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